



Paine is Moving Agriculture Forward While Having Fun

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MADISON – When Laura Paine discusses her job at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), she uses the words fun, interesting, fascinating and neat. Paine, a Grazing and Organic Agriculture Specialist, enjoys her work as she helps to move the grazing and organic agricultural sectors forward.

“Laura Paine’s work at DATCP continues to help Wisconsin establish and maintain our state’s double digit gains and leadership in organics and grazing,” said Mike Powers, Administrator of Agricultural Development.

“Whether someone is transitioning to a grass-fed dairy herd, sourcing organic ingredients or forming a new beef or dairy cooperative, Laura lends her own expertise and brings entire network of others who help ensure sustainable, profitable success.”

Paine began her current role at DATCP in April of 2006. Previously, she had been a crops and soils agent at Columbia County UW-Extension and a research specialist for the UW-Madison Agronomy Department. Paine received her undergraduate degree in botany from Southern Illinois University and a Master’s degree in horticulture from the UW-Madison. Many would be surprised with Paine’s knowledge and experience in agriculture that she did not grow up on a farm.

“I have always had an interest in the environment and how we take care of the land,” explained Paine. “Because my family was so unconnected to the land, I felt a strong need to reconnect myself and have done that by working with systems that provide clear environmental benefits.”

The best part of the position for Paine is when projects combine research with education and outreach. She is currently in the midst of a four-year project on grass-based dairy products, funded by the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) program. The project brings farmers, researchers, processors and chefs together to explore the potential of grass-fed dairy products.

“This project allowed us to have all perspectives of the supply chain in one room to compare the products,” added Paine. “It’s given each of us an opportunity to look at the picture from different perspectives. It’s helped us all understand how much influence what is fed to the cattle has on the taste and even the melting point of a cheese.”

Paine is also working with other agencies and grazing industry partners to provide valuable education and technical assistance for Wisconsin farmers. According to a recent survey, 42-percent of all beef farms and 22-percent of all dairy farms currently use management intensive grazing.

Paine divides her time assisting the organic and grazing agricultural sectors. She is the manager of Wisconsin’s Organic Cost Share Certification Program and coordinates the activities of Wisconsin’s Organic Advisory Council. The Advisory Council works to provide longer-term benefits to the industry by raising interest, advising agencies, and supporting growth.

Wisconsin continues to be a leader in the organic industry. The number of certified organic farms in Wisconsin has grown from 422 in 2002 to over 1,200 in 2007. Wisconsin is second in the nation after California in numbers of organic farms and first in numbers of organic dairy farms. The state is in the



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top five states in certified organic acreage and in production of all major organic crops and livestock types.

The success of organic and grazing production systems rely on consumer demand. Paine has helped create Consumer Guides on grass-fed beef and organic foods. These guides explain the production methods and benefits of choosing these products. Paine sees the organic and grazing production methods continuing to grow in Wisconsin.

“As input costs for producers continue to increase, low input systems like managed grazing and organic production are looking like a more attractive production model for beginning farmers or farmers looking to grow their business by adding value,” said Paine. “Consumers continue to be more and more interested in where their food comes from and how it is raised.”

Paine has had many highlights during her time at DATCP from helping to create the Wisconsin Grass-fed Beef Cooperative for members to sell their beef to organizing workshops for veterinarians on organic treatment for dairy herds. As she looks forward, Paine still has her eyes on one goal for the organic and grazing industries.

“Consumers are looking for food that reflects their values, and they are willing to pay a premium for unique, artisan products from Wisconsin. I want to make sure producers earn a consistent, premium price for their high-quality products,” concluded Paine. “Our research and outreach can contribute to a solid marketplace for the organic and grazing industries while using sustainable agricultural practices.”

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